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Critical Interpretation

BCAR3013: Creative Arts in Cultural Context

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March 2, 2025

Positive Illustration of Culture: [Etthen Heldeli: Caribou Eaters](#)

The documentary, *Etthen Heldeli: Caribou Eaters* represents the ancient and preserved lifestyle of the Déné First Nations, also known as the Athapaskan peoples. For this indigenous group, caribou is a way of life, (Citytv, 2018, 0:11). It goes beyond just a food source, the group uses it in its entirety, from clothing, to drums and food (Citytv, 2018, 12:30). This documentary's target audience is aimed at non-indigenous Canadians, as it is an expression of their lifestyle and traditions. The documentary shares their ways of life and values to any of us unknown and/or uneducated of indigenous culture.

The importance of Caribou for the Athapaskan people is so vast that they will travel thousands of miles, as it is something they eat every day (Citytv, 2018, 2:50). They endure a six hour journey by snowmobile to hunt caribou (Citytv, 2018, 34:25), multiple animals are hunted and butchered on the spot to ensure the animal is used to the maximum, and any bits left over are shared with the surrounding wildlife, like the wolves.

The drum holds great importance to the Déné, they use the drum taught by the elders (Citytv, 2018, 28:46), and hand make them from caribou skin. The drum used to be a way to call the caribou (Citytv, 2018, 30:30).

It is evident the Athapaskans are grateful for the caribou, to them it is like a gift. When they are giving thanks for the opportunity to hunt, especially in the present day when population is scarce, they give thanks in their native language (even when they were speaking English moments prior), showing again the importance of caribou to the Athapaskan peoples (Citytv, 2018, 8:00). The Athapaskans have been in negotiations with the government to protect the caribou territory, as it is vital to their way of life (Citytv, 2018, 18:30).

It is important to pass down stories and traditions to the younger generations told by the elders (Citytv, 2018, 13:45), as the way of life in the past will soon disappear given all the ecological changes the world as a whole is facing, it is vital the ways of life get passed down to never be forgotten. Additionally, to enhance the importance of passing down traditions from elders to the younger generations is of great importance, there is an annual elder and youth culture trip, where the younger generations can experience traditional cultural activities (ice fishing for example) with the elders (Citytv, 2018, 30:00). The land the Athapaskans live on is viewed as *mother* (Citytv, 2018, 14:15), as the ancestors have lived out here for many years prior, and their spirits still sit out in nature, they are known to be there and within you always, connecting to everything surrounding you.

Traditional practices are very important to the Athapaskans. In the past, when the ancestors would hunt, they hunted with spears, and cooked with no pots, so it was traditional to cook a caribou gut stew in the sac of the stomach, and place hot rocks inside the sac to cook the stew (Citytv, 2018, 27:30). Even though we live in a much advanced world and they have access to cooking pots and other materials to aid in cooking, it is by choice they cook in their traditional ways. We later then see the traditional picnic and cooking methods of the Athapaskans, where the entire caribou heads are cooking over a large open fire made from the surrounding trees, the meat is singed first and then slowcooked (Citytv, 2018, 33:00).

When the caribou population is scarce and cannot be hunted, the Athapaskan's resort to hunting other wildlife, like moose, fish and waterfowl to meet their dietary needs (Citytv, 2018, 24:25). It is important that their source of protein is hunted in the wild, instead of eating meat (like chicken, beef, pork), from the stores.

The main problematic area this film could possess is the portrayal of hunting wild animals. To other cultures in North America (nonindigenous), this would be seen as abnormal, and maybe even animal cruelty. There is a large percentage of people who are vegan/vegetarian, specifically to support anti-animal cruelty, and hunting wild animals may be extremely offputting to that percentage of people. Even those who eat meat might find hunting and butchering of wildlife vulgar and striking, as we farm animals specifically for food consumption, and to many people, animals like caribou or moose would never be something we'd eat, but only admire in their natural habitat.

Some may also see the dying population of caribou is at fault from the hunting by the Athapaskans, and may cause their group to be looked down on. There are various factors on why the population has been declining over the years, but some could argue that ceasing caribou hunting would be a significant way to improve the population.

Overall, this film is a great representation of Canadian indigenous lifestyle. It shows the importance of history and tradition, value and beliefs of the D  n   peoples. It is evident the caribou is truly a part of their way of life, and they will go to extremes to hunt and provide it to the group.

Insensitive Illustration of Culture: [Ghostbusters: Frozen Empire - Sewer Dragon Clip - Only In Cinemas Now](#)

In the film *Ghostbusters: Frozen Empire*, one of the ghosts targeted is known as a "Sewer Dragon," which can be seen at 0:03 of the linked clip. This dragon is based on eastern cultures' depictions of dragons. In this scene the dragon is seen causing chaos and destruction to

its surroundings, and was previously lurking in the Hell's Kitchen restaurant. This depiction of an eastern style dragon is incredibly insensitive to eastern culture, in this case focusing on Chinese culture. In Chinese culture the dragon is heavily valued, and it represents various aspects of Chinese culture and beliefs. Some of these include kindness, nobleness, good fortune, as well as offer of protection and the association of weather control in regards to agricultural life (CLI, 2024).

As eastern dragons are viewed as a positive token to Chinese culture, its depiction in this film is incredibly skewed. As mentioned previously, this dragon was seen lurking in Hell's Kitchen, even though this is a restaurant, based on Chinese cultural beliefs and values, a dragon would not have any kind of association with Hell. Given that it's a symbol of kindness and good fortune, it would not have any connection to Hell in any form, as it alienates its ideology within Chinese culture.

In addition, as dragons are known to be linked to the control of weather, specifically precipitation and winds, it also does not fit the philosophy of being connected to the sky and climate if it is associated with Hell, which is universally depicted to be underground, which is illustrated to be hot and fiery. This breaks the connection between the dragon and the elements of weather control.

Blue dragons specifically are known to be seen as spiritual, and can control both the rain and winds, which in this case the design of the dragon (being blue), fits the spiritual design, but it is causing harm and destruction and does not represent the proper elemental benefits to humanity (CLI, 2024).

As previously mentioned, we also see this dragon causing chaos and disaster to its surroundings, at approximately 0:19. We know that dragons are a sign of luck and good fortune,

so this scene of the dragon inducing damage, fear and confusion does not fit the beliefs of dragons in Chinese culture once again, as it in fact should create the opposite effect to its surroundings.

There are various ways this scene could be improved to be more culturally appropriate and provide a non-skewed portrayal to Chinese culture. The easiest way to focus it away from Chinese culture would be redesigning it as a western dragon, which traditionally has wings. These dragons are more commonly known to portray violence and evil (Rosenberg, 2023, para. 6). Unfortunately, this redesign most likely would not meet the qualifications aligned with its lore in the film, so it would probably need more adjustments.

We can see around 0:11 its head comes into frame, and it seems to be related to some aquatic creature, possibly an angler fish. If the design of the dragon was revisited to be more aquatic like, it could be redesigned to be something unknown from the deep sea, as the deep sea is still vastly unknown, the creature could be completely abstract and provide a convincing shape and/or visual to replace the dragon.

Another plausible replacement would be a snakehead fish. Snakeheads are an invasive species to the United States and are well established in New York. (Benson, Fuller, Fusaro, Neilson, Nunez, 2025, para. 19). As the film takes place in New York, it would make geological sense to swap the dragon for a snakehead, being they are an invasive species to New York and would better fit the shape/design to lurk around the sewers. Snakeheads are able to live out of water for up to four days, so it's reasonable for a snakehead to make its way into a sewer (Benson, Fuller, Fusaro, Neilson, Nunez, 2025, para. 13). Given that snakeheads are an invasive species it would make much more sense to have this creature intrude the city, as it provides more

of a believable story that an intrusive species would be sneaking around the city causing havoc, in a place where it is not supposed to be.

Overall, the portrayal of the Sewer Dragon in *GhostBusters: Frozen Empire* evidently shows insensitivity to Chinese culture, as the representation of dragons in this film is contradictory and goes against the values and beliefs of Chinese culture. There are various ways the sewer creature design could be revisited to make it more culturally appropriate, make more geological sense and provide a more credible story and/or scenario for this creature to be lurking in the city.

References

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